

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 PHNOM 13462 01 OF 02 080700Z

13

ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

----- 035283

R 080430Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7977

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 13462

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, XC

SUBJECT: SOUTHEAST ASIA IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT: A VIEW FROM
BANGKOK

REF: BANGKOK 15626

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PAGE 02 PHNOM 13462 01 OF 02 080700Z

1. AMBASSADOR KINTNER'S INITIATIVE IN PROPOSING A DIA-LOGUE ON THIS WIDE-RANGING AND IMPORTANT SUBJECT IS WELCOMED BY PHNOM PENH. THIS TOPIC MIGHT FORM A USEFUL SUBJECT FOR THOROUGH CONSIDERATION BY S/PC AND OTHER SIMILAR WASHINGTON INSTITUTIONS WHICH HAVE BOTH THE MANDATE AND THE RESOURCES TO CONSIDER SUCH FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES IN DEPTH.

2. FACED AS WE ARE HERE, UNFORTUNATELY, WITH THE OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS OF AN EXTREMELY BUSY POST, THE EMBASSY WOULD PREFER TO LIMIT ITSELF FOR NOW TO COMMENTS REACTIVE TO AMBASSADOR KINTNER'S PAPER, LEAVING TO OTHERS THE TASK OF PRODUCING COMPETING IDEAS AND CONCEPTS. THIS MESSAGE SIMPLY ADDRESSES THOSE PARAGRAPHS IN THE REFTEL TO WHICH COMMENT FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF PHNOM PENH SEEMS INDICATED.

3. WITH RESPECT TO THE SIX STRATEGIC ASSUMPTIONS CONTAINED IN PARA 3, REFTEL, WE AGREE WITH SUBPARA (4) THAT THE SOVIET UNION IS THE PRINCIPAL THREAT TO WORLD STABILITY AND TO US GLOBAL INTERESTS, BUT WE BELIEVE THIS THEME CAN BE OVERSTATED WITH RESPECT TO SEA, WHERE CONFLICTING INTERESTS AND FORCES SEEM RATHER MORE COMPLEX TO US. AGAIN IN SUBPARA (6) WE WOULD NOT ATTACH TOO GREAT A WEIGHT TO THE RELIANCE OF NORTH VIET-NAM ON ITS" CURRENT MAJOR PATRON, THE SOVIET UNION. WE THINK THIS UNDERESTIMATES THE POLITICAL, MONETARY, AND ECONOMIC DYNAMISM OF NORTH VIET-NAM ITSELF WHICH, WE SUSPECT, WOULD UNDER CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES CONTINUE TO POSE MAJOR PROBLEMS IN THE AREA EVEN WERE SOVIET SUPPORT TO BE DIMINISHED. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT MAY BE THAT THE SOVIETS ARE PUTTING MOST OF THEIR EGGS IN THE NVN BASKET LARGELY BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN KEPT OUT OF THE ACTION ELSEWHERE IN THE PENINSULA.

4. WITH RESPECT TO PARA 5, SUBPARA (1), WE WONDER IF THIS DOES NOT OVERSTATE THE DEGREE TO WHICH SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IN BOTH THE INDIAN AND WESTERN PACIFIC OCEANS DEPENDS UPON THE EXTENT OF SOVIET PRESENCE IN AND INFLUENCE OVER SEA. ONE WOULD THINK THE NEED FOR COALING

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 PHNOM 13462 01 OF 02 080700Z

STATIONS BETWEEN THE BLACK SEA AND VLADIVOSTOK HAS LARGELY PASSED, AND THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE DEMONSTRATED A HIGH DEGREE OF CAPABILITY FOR LONG-RANGING, WORLD-WIDE NAVAL OPERATIONS. ON SUBPARA (2), WE ARE NOT SURE THAT THE PRC WILL NOT ACQUIRE THE CAPABILITY FOR REGIONAL HEGEMONY--IF THAT INDEED IS HER OBJECTIVE--BEFORE A GENERATION HAS PASSED, BUT WE SUGGEST THAT IF THIS SHOULD NOT PROVE TO BE THE CASE, PERHAPS THE GREATEST OBSTACLE

TO THAT HEGEMONY MAY PROVE TO BE NORTH VIET-NAM, AS IT
INTERACTS UPON AND WITH OTHER POWERS, RATHER THAN EITHER
THE US OR THE SOVIET UNION ALONE. WITH RESPECT TO
SUBPARA (4), WE WONDER WHETHER THIS DOES NOT OVERSTATE
THE IMPORTANCE OF SEA TO THE SINO-SOVIET CONFRONTATION.
IT IS NOT CERTAIN THAT IT IS A MAJOR THEATER FOR EITHER
CONTESTANT. PERHAPS IT SHOULD BE, OR PERHAPS US INTERESTS
MIGHT BE BETTER SERVED IF IT WERE.

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PAGE 01 PHNOM 13462 02 OF 02 080649Z

11
ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W
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R 080430Z OCT 74
FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7978
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 13462

EXDIS

5. PARA 6, REFTTEL, OMITS WHAT SEEMS TO US THE VERY REAL

POSSIBILITY THAT NONE OF THE THREE--US, USSR OR PRC--
MAY ULTIMATELY GAIN THE ASCENDANCY IN THE AREA, BUT
THAT BY REASON OF A VACUUM CREATED BY THE FAILURE OF
THESE THREE TO REACH SOME SORT OF TACIT UNDERSTANDING
OVER THE AREA, THE WAY MAY BE OPEN FOR THE FOX--NORTH
VIET-NAM-- TO SLIP IN AND CARRY OFF THE CHICKENS. ONE
WOULD THINK THAT THIS WOULD REPRESENT THE MOST IMMINENT
THREAT AS SEEN BY THE THAIS, AS IT CLEARLY IS SEEN BY

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 PHNOM 13462 02 OF 02 080649Z

THE KHMERS AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE.

6. ON PARA 7, REFTEL, AGAIN AS SEEN FROM THE PHNOM
PENH VANTAGE POINT, WE DO NOT SEE THE NEED AT THIS
TIME TO "CHECK SOVIET INFLUENCE AND POSSIBLE PENETRATION
INTO" SEA, BUT RATHER, PERHAPS, THE USEFULNESS OF SEEKING
TO GET THE SOVIETS INVOLVED IN SUCH A MANNER AS TO LEAD
THEM TO DEVELOP OTHER INTERESTS WHICH WOULD COMPETE WITH
SOVIET INTERESTS IN NORTH VIET-NAM, THUS INDUCING THE
SOVIETS TO MODERATE THE DEGREE OF THEIR SUPPORT FOR THAT
COUNTRY.

7. WITH REGARD TO PARA 9, REFTEL, WHILE WE DO NOT
PRETEND TO BE COMPETENT TO PREDICT THE CIRCUMSTANCES
UNDER WHICH THE PRC MIGHT SEEK AN ACCOMMODATION, HOW-
EVER TEMPORARY, WITH THE SOVIET UNION, OUR INSTINCTS LEAD
US TO BELIEVE THAT FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IN SEA ARE NOT
LIKELY TO LOOM AS A MAJOR FACTOR IN BRINGING ABOUT SUCH
A RESULT.

8. THE OBJECTIVES SET FORTH IN PARA 10 ARE WELL STATED
AND APPROPRIATE, BUT NOT BECAUSE THEY WOULD TEND TO
BOLSTER THE PRC, BUT BECAUSE THEY SEEM DIRECTLY INDI-
CATED AS DESIRABLE IN OUR BILATERAL CONFRONTATION WITH
THE SOVIET UNION.

9. WE IN THE AREA CAN ONLY HEARTILY ENDORSE THE COM-
MENT IN PARA 12 WITH REGARD TO THE WAY IN WHICH US
PERFORMANCE DURING ITS DISENGAGEMENT FROM SEA IS VIEWED
BY NATIONS IN THE REGION AS A TEST
OF OUR RELIABILITY. THE SAME AGREEMENT MIGHT BE VOICED
WITH RESPECT TO PARA 13, ON CONGRESIONAL RELUCTANCE
TO PROVIDE NEEDED LEVELS OF ASSISTANCE, AS NONE CAN TES-
TIFY BETTER THAN WE IN CAMBODIA.

10. PARA 14, REFTEL, MENTIONS THE DESIRABILITY OF
PLANNING FOR THE POSSIBILITY THAT AN ADEQUATE BUFFER
BETWEEN THAILAND AND NORTH VIET-NAM WILL NOT EXIST.
THIS POSSIBILITY SEEMS, FROM HERE, A VIRTUAL CERTAINTY.
NEVERTHELESS, THIS SHOULD NOT CETER US FROM OUR EFFORTS

TO CREATE ONE, NOT NECESSARILY AS A LINE OF DEFENSE

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 PHNOM 13462 02 OF 02 080649Z

TO THE THAIS, BUT AS A MEANS OF EXTRICATING OURSELVES FROM AN OVEREXTENDED US POSITION IN CAMBODIA, AS WE DID IN LAOS.

11. IT SEEMS LIKELY TO US THAT THE THAIS ARE GOING TO HAVE TO COME TO GRIPS AT SOME POINT WITH THE VERY REAL POSSIBILITY OF HAVING TO SHARE THE SEA PENINSULA WITH A TOUGH, DETERMINED AND AGGRESSIVE NORTH VIET-NAM. THERE ARE TWO POSSIBLE THAI REACTIONS, ONE WOULD THINK: TO MAINTAIN AND BUILD UP THEIR OWN MILITARY STRENGTH AGAINST A POSSIBLE CONFRONTATION, OR TO ACT IN THE MORE TRADITIONAL THAI HISTORICAL FASHION OF SEEKING TO PLAY THE GREAT POWERS OFF AGAINST EACH OTHER, SO AS TO PRESERVE THAI TERRITORY AND SOVEREIGNTY. PERHAPS THE MOST NATURAL ALLY FOR THE THAIS MIGHT IN THE FIRST INSTANCE BE THE CHINESE, WHO MIGHT HAVE MORE INTEREST THAN THE US AND THE USSR IN CONTAINING THE NORTH VIET-NAMESE. WE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY SHARE THIS INTEREST, BUT PROBABLY WITH DIMINISHING ENTHUSIASM AND COMMITMENT ON OUR PART. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY, WHICH WE SUGGESTED ABOVE, OF REDUCING SOVIET SUPPORT FOR NORTH VIET-NAM BY PROVIDING COMPENSATING, AND PERHAPS CONFLICTING, SOVIET INTERESTS IN THAILAND. IN AT LEAST THE SHORT RUN PERIOD OF DECLINING CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE CURRENT AND PAST ACTIVE US ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, WE SERIOUSLY QUESTION WHETHER AN INCREASED AMERICAN SECURITY COMMITMENT, PUBLIC OR TACIT, IN FAVOR OF ANY COUNTRY OR GROUP OF COUNTRIES IN THE AREA IS IN THE CARDS. WHETHER WE IN THE FOREIGN POLICY ESTABLISHMENT LIKE IT OR NOT, WE PLAN POLICY IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF VERY REAL DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS, AND NO PRACTICABLE POLICY SUGGESTION CAN FAIL TO TAKE DOMESTIC PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES INTO ACCOUNT.

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